

Madame Polina

Watching *Fathers And Sons* on the BBC, 1969, or thereabouts. Adaptation by Jack Pullman I presume. But why *Fathers And Sons*? In French it's *Pères et Enfants*, and the same in the Russian original as well. It's not really true there's no girl children in it, Arkady is pure girl in a man's body as he pursues his hopeless love for the Countess. Poor boy, far too sensitive.

Next stop 1976. The Sex Pistols. *Anarchy In The UK*. First time I'd heard the word *anarchy*, looked it up in the school library, came up with Prince Kropotkin. Long hot summer. England thrashed by the Windies. Feeling like Bazarov, a rebel without a cause, Jimmy Dean writ large. Finding liberalism in Turgenev, read the lot, at Cambridge studying Alan Paton, another liberal, the much abused middle way. Edinburgh Festival 1984, double bill, *Viardot* and *The Life To Come*. *Turgenev's Sphinx*. Written, directed and produced by *moi*. Too much. Nadine Gordimer, South African blacks and Russian serfs. 1862. The emancipation. 1948. Apartheid and Bradman's last tour of England. Prince Lutuli, Nelson Mandela, the ANC. 1990. A certain release from Robben Island. *Amandla!* Where will it end? Is democracy even a good idea? Well, to some extent... *A dumas* for example. Kerensky and February 1917. The only liberal revolution there's ever been? Yes, *dumas*... Russian for *thought*, not the second name of Alexandre... Was the Russian Revolution really a "People's Tragedy"? No one ever says that about the French one. *Could the Tsarina see it coming?* And what's a soprano got to do with it? Pol, Polina, Polyana. Pauline in the west. Well, she can't see the connection either, but her husband can. Ivan Sergevich Turgenev is in the middle of course...

Michael Black, Macclesfield, 30th May 2009